

NEWSLETTER COLUMN for JULY 2011

Welcome to the middle of the summer season – heat-bleached skies, temperatures so hot the birds are panting, and the only cool water to be found is located in either your refrigerator or the Pacific Ocean. Just keep saying to yourself: “It’s a dry heat, it’s a dry heat.”

I’d like to begin this month’s column with a shout-out Birthday wish for the United States of America: “Happy 235th Happy Birthday USA!” On behalf of myself and my family, a heartfelt “Thank You!” to all those Americans who have or are serving in our armed forces in order to protect and preserve our democratic form of government with all the privileges we enjoy today.

In past columns I’ve taken some time to encourage folks to support the Red Cross organization. Given the rash of displaced Arizonans (and Americans in general, for that matter) during 2011 due to floods, fires, droughts, and other man-made or natural disasters – now is clearly the time for us all to seriously consider contributing time or money to the Arizona and/or Grand Canyon Chapter of the American Red Cross. By going to <http://americanredcross.org> or contacting them at info@arizonaredcross.org or by calling 1.800.842.7349 – you can help make a difference in the life of someone in distress. And who knows? Perhaps that might be you some day.

As those of you who have been living in Pinal County for some time know, there are times when the Santa Cruz River floods with a vengeance. A significant part of western Pinal County became flooded in events taking place in 1963, 1983, and 1993 just to name a few dates. What is now the City of Maricopa was pretty much under water – especially the land south of the Union Pacific Railroad – and so was the subdivision of Desert Carmel, located just east and north of the Francisco Grande.

Recently Pinal County, local landowners along the Santa Cruz River, Pinal irrigation districts, and our Native American tribal neighbors joined together to form the Lower Santa Cruz River Alliance. The Alliance’s mission is to reengage the U.S. Corps of Engineers in identifying and then engineering a flood control solution that will remove much of western Pinal County from the Santa Cruz floodplain. If successful, future generations of Pinal residents will no longer have to fear a rampaging Santa Cruz River or shell out precious household dollars for flood insurance.

I’m pleased to say that Pinal County government and the Pinal County Flood Control District has taken a lead role in this coalition to mitigate the matter – on behalf of the County I serve as the Alliance’s Treasurer. We now have some 20 Arizona institutions, government agencies, and organizations signed on as members and Governor Brewer has signed off on a resolution of support as has the Arizona State Legislature. I will keep you updated on our progress.

There’s quite a bit of excitement in Maricopa this month as Banner Health and the City of Maricopa stage a groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the construction of the Banner Health Center. Everyone’s invited to the southwest corner of Porter Road and Alan Stephens Parkway in Maricopa on Saturday, July 23rd at 8 a.m. The facility is slated to be open for business in the summer of 2012.

Speaking of health care events, Cenpatco of Arizona and Horizon Human Services are collaborating on a two day (July 7 & 8) program of Mental Health First Aid. The class will be held at Horizon's offices in Casa Grande – 120 E. Main Street – but since seating is limited, those interested in attending must pre-register with De Porter at 520.836.1688, extension 1858.

Kudos go to the hard working staff and volunteers of the Casa Grande Alliance – they were recently awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Arizona Parents Commission for the purpose of providing parenting skills training to this area. The grant project includes the production of a television show on the Casa Grande public access channel. This fine local community organization is dedicated to the proposition that our children can and must avoid the perils of drugs and alcohol -- and that it is up to all of us to band together in a common effort to eliminate these threats to our children as they grow up in our community. For more information, contact Cindy Schaider, CGA Executive Director, at 520.836.5022 or go to <http://www.casagrandealliance.org>.

The last word this month is about the final adoption of the FY 2011-12 County budget. I am pleased to report that I was able to keep the property tax rate flat (\$3.99/\$100 of assessed value) for the coming year. Since the average property valuation in Pinal is decreasing by some 16%, this means that as far as the County taxes a resident will pay, the amount will be less than previous years. Please remember that the County's share of a typical tax bill is only 28% -- the balance of a typical tax bill will also include school and community college district taxes, a city tax, and perhaps other special district (i.e. irrigation or electrical or fire) taxes that are levied by those districts' governing boards.

Last year's County budget was \$414M. This year's County budget is \$357M ... a decrease of nearly 17%. Personnel were let go, programs were decreased in size, scope, or eliminated altogether as the Board worked with the County's management team and constitutional officers to bring the budget into balance. This despite a new wave of program and cost shifts from the State of Arizona to Pinal County – including a mandatory payment of \$2.6M from our treasury to the State.

More next month on what Pinal County government is doing to diversify our local economy and lead us out of our economic doldrums.

David Snider, District 3
Pinal County Board of Supervisors